

Three Early Kēris.

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With Plates V. and VI.

The three *kēris* illustrated in Plate V, different views of two of which may be seen in Plate VI, are probably the earliest authenticated specimens in any English collection. To describe them briefly. The *kēris* on the left, a curving blade with 13 *lok*, has a hilt showing the features of a European in a helmet and chain gorget, features as caricatured as is the portrait of the Dutchman in the folk-tale of *Anggun che Tunggal*

Gērham-nya empat sa-rumpun ;

Sa-gantang makan daging ;

Dua chupak lēkat di gigi-nya.

The small *kēris* in the centre of Plate V and on the left of Plate VI has a hilt carved with the Javanese representation of some demi-god from the *wayang kulit* cycle, possibly Arjuna; probably, any Javanese could identify it, though writing in England I have no means to discover. It is to be noted that the angle of the hilt follows the conventional attitude of the *Jawa dēmam* or cobra-headed Malay hilt, the evolution of which is and probably will remain unsolved. It may be remarked, that the high forehead of Javanese demi-gods would seem to point to this artistic type deriving from a people among whom binding of the head was a custom.

The third *kēris*, which is illustrated only in Plate V is interesting for several reasons:—the blade, by the bye, is damasked and has eleven *lok*. The hilt preserves the conventional angle of the *Jawa dēmam*; the long-nosed figure (the nose unfortunately has been broken off) with its row of teeth has a striking affinity with the still longer nosed figure on Patani *kēris* hilts, but the back of its head is carved with hair like that of the last *kēris*. And it is to be noted that the curved conventional ornament round mouth and chin is almost identical with that round mouth and chin of the Javanese demi-god.

These three *kēris* are now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and belong to the old Tradescant Collection, which dates from the beginning of the 17th century.

John Tradescant the elder is said by Anthony à Wood to have been a Dutchman, but was probably English even in his name, of which other variants were Tradeskin and Tredeskin. He and his son of the same name were travellers, naturalists and gardeners and introduced into England the lilac, acacia, occidental plane and possibly the pine-apple. In the service of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, the father dealt "with all merchants from all places but especially from Virginia, Bermudas, New-



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Benrose, Collo., Derby.



KERIS IN THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, OXFORD.

foundland, Guinea, Binney, the Amazon and the East Indies for all manner of rare beasts fowls and birds shells and stones." On Buckingham's death, he seems to have entered the service of the king and queen and probably at that date established his physic garden and museum at the east side of South Lambeth Road, leading from Vauxhall to Stockwell. He was the first in England who "made any considerable collection of the subjects of natural history." He died 1637-1638. The son succeeded the father as gardener to Queen Henrietta Maria, and was also a traveller. In 1656 resolving "to take a catalogue of those rarities and curiosities which my father had sedulously collected" he published his *Museum Tradescantianum*. This book in its 179 pages contains lists of birds, shells, fishes, insects, minerals, fruits, war instruments, habits, utensils, coins and medals. Among entries of other warlike instruments from Japan, Turkey, India, China, Canada, Virginia, Ginny, Persia, and Muscovy occurs the entry on page 46 of "Poisoned creeses or Daggers, two waved two plain"—apparently one of the plain has been lost. In 1659 Tradescant and his wife sealed and delivered a deed of gift of this collection of rarities to Sir Thomas Ashmole, but his will of date 1661 bequeathed the collection to his wife for life and after her decease to "the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge to which of them she shall think fit." There was a law-suit and Ashmole got the collection "to have and enjoy." In 1677 Ashmole offered it to Oxford as soon as a building should be erected to receive it. In 1683 Wren finished a building and the collection went to Oxford in 'barges', and "the name of Tradescant was unjustly sunk in that of Ashmole." Ashmole, of course, was not a traveller, but Windsor herald and author of a book on the order of the Garter.

The old M.S. catalogue of the Tradescant collection compiled in 1685 by Edward Lhywd, first Assistant Keeper of the Ashmolean and still preserved in the archives of the museum contains entries of several creeses vaguely described and an attempt at exact description of the little demi-god hilted kĕris: "117 *Pugio anceps in macronem exit, manubrium simiae imaginem exprimit: a double-edged, dagger tapering to a point,—its handle exhibiting the figure of an ape.*" The *vagina lignea* or wooden scabbard has been lost.

The official catalogue of the Ashmolean Collection of 1836 has the entries

- 32 *Two Malay creeses or daggers with waved blades. Mus. Tradesc.*
 33 *Another with straight blade. Mus. Tradesc.*

So we have the history of these three kĕris established practically beyond doubt back to the early years of the XVIth century. I am indebted to Mr. E. T. Leeds, formerly of the F. M. S. Civil Service and now Assistant Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum for calling my attention to these weapons, getting them photographed for me and putting the Catalogues cited at my disposal.